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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000385

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM SOCI IR

SUBJECT: IRAN: IRIG SEES ROOT CAUSES OF OPPOSITION IN THE CLASSROOM AND IN THE THEATER

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CLASSIFIED BY: Timothy Richardson, Acting Director, Iran Regional Presence Office, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Supreme Leader Khamenei and the IRIG have signaled their intention to move beyond the arrests of opposition figures and attack the perceived intellectual basis of the opposition. This initiative seems to be at least a two-pronged approach -- limiting the ability of universities to inculcate anti-Islamic and anti-regime sentiment and warning Iran's artist community to stop use of anti-regime themes in film and other media. It appears that Iranian universities will open as scheduled, after earlier rumors they would not, and the IRIG is enhancing the security presence on Iranian campuses to prevent student protests. Moreover, the IRIG is also considering reviewing the humanities curriculum to ensure its compatibility with the Islamic Republic. Some analysts and IRPO contacts are warning of a second Cultural Revolution that could include further efforts to purge the university system of liberal influences and increasing pressure on prominent artists to conform to IRIG-approved themes to further combat Western efforts of "soft overthrow." End summary.

On Campus and in the Classroom

¶2. (C) The majority of Iran's universities are scheduled to open on September 23, though there was some earlier speculation that the beginning of classes may be delayed on the pretext of preventing an outbreak of H1N1. More recent indications are that universities will in fact open, but under a heavy security presence to include police and Baseejis highly visible on campus. IRPO contacts have also noted that an undetermined number of students have already been expelled from universities for up to eight semesters for participating in protests or having links to the opposition.

¶3. (C) Beyond the immediate goal of preventing campuses from becoming a source of further unrest, the IRIG's longer term strategy appears to be to try to inoculate universities from exposure to the ideas that form the intellectual bases of the opposition. In an August 30 speech to university professors and Baseej students, Ayatollah Khamenei warned that the teaching of the social sciences and humanities that run counter to the ideals of the revolution and should be curtailed. Khamenei said that the teaching of such sciences leads to "loss of belief in

godly and Islamic knowledge" and to skepticism and doubt. Subsequent press reports have indicated the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council has begun considering revisions to the university curricula to limit teaching of the social sciences and humanities. (Note: Iran's Cultural Revolution was an effort to rid Iranian universities of Western and other non-Islamic influence from 1980 to 1987. At its outset, universities were closed for three years, and later, books were banned and students and faculty purged.)

¶14. (C) An Iranian academic now on a fellowship abroad, whose entry into the university had been delayed in the initial Cultural Revolution, told us that colleagues in Iran were worried over the prospects of clashes on campuses and faculty purges. She said that it was near certain that the IRIG planned to take some action to tighten control over what is being taught in Iranian universities. She added that liberal arts and social science teaching and research in Iran had never fully recovered after the First Cultural Revolution -- inadequate and outdated textbooks, lack of access to Western research, the loss of highly regarded professors who have never been replaced -- and further diminution of them now would cripple them inside Iran.

In the Theater and Gallery

¶15. (C) Simultaneously, the IRIG has also warned filmmakers and other artists about becoming involved in "soft overthrow" plots to prevent what it sees as inflammatory and destabilizing ideas from reaching the public. Many of them openly supported Mousavi during the election, and in our meetings with them, have shown open contempt for the IRIG. Khamenei met with several

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filmmakers, writers and other artists on September 15 to urge them to use their art to glorify the Sacred Defense (the Iran-Iraq War) and its values of epic struggle, piety, idealism, altruism, resistance, and wisdom. According to one account we heard, director Majid Majidi, whose film "Children of Heaven" was nominated for an Oscar and who directed Mousavi's campaign video, complained to Khamenei about the "oppression" of artists after the election. An Iranian filmmaker based in the UAE told us that several filmmakers who supported reformist candidates are now on an IRIG blacklist and said Khamenei's message to artists in his speech was a warning to promote IRIG-approved themes or else. Another IRPO contact who fled Iran after being arrested for making a critical documentary about the post-election unrest, told us fear of arrest and torture had grown throughout the arts community.

Comment

¶16. (C) Not content with forcing the opposition off the streets, the IRIG now appears to be trying to get at what it sees as the intellectual basis of the opposition movement. This root cause of the criticism of the regime, in the IRIG's collective mind, is promulgated in the teaching of liberal, Western humanities and the political commentary hidden within works of art. Students, intellectuals and artists remain some of the most vehement critics of the regime, and it appears that the IRIG is now taking further steps keep them in check, promising a long-term struggle.

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